

characteristic humour. Few men of such determined views were less fanatical, yet Mat would say that that was simply the anarchist philosophy – to hold clear views and hold them firmly, but with tolerance and respect for the rights of other individuals. All of those who knew him will be sad at his death, but his life was a rich and a good one, and he lived it to the full.

J.H. [John Hewetson]
Freedom March 20, 1954 ■

Mat Kavanagh [Letter]

It is with deep regret – and this is no pious sentimentality – that I heard the news of our dear comrade's death. The tribute by John Hewetson was movingly and grandly written, because it was true to the character of Mat: his cheerfulness, his tolerance and his sincere convictions for the cause of freedom.

What can one say? Only a fortnight ago I sent him a fair supply of literature to ease the lack of contact with old friends; and how he did enjoy going over the past of his anarchist exploits. How too, one enjoyed every minute of his lively conversation on this topic, and never tired of his wit and vital interest in political developments throughout the world.

We wrote at odd intervals of time to one another, and his letters always held for me great inspiration and practical commonsense. They were never very grammatical or even wholly legible towards the end, but they carried conviction and the honesty of one who scorned the conditioning of Authority and the whole mumbo-jumbo of political power seeking and corruption.

I remember the first evening I saw him, at a Lancashire meeting. He was very happy in his anecdotes of anarchist tradition, and gave us a delightfully humorous picture of Labour and Communist careerists, eager to deny their previous Libertarian connections and past.

He must, indeed, have been a nightmare to those 'safe' political leaders of the Labour Movement, whose early associations with Anarchism were to be erased from their memory, and from other memories, at all or any costs! Mat was the boy to remind them of certain principles which no amount of political opportunism could change or destroy. Their worship of mammon was not criticised as a religious deflection, but as a concrete fact, that they approved of the money system of buying and selling – both commodities and human beings – and that the true community-purpose of living for each other, and for happiness and creative effort, was absent from every scrap of their mental and physical make up!

Many of us stray off the path of Libertarian principles and fellowship, because, of course, we are human in an often very inhuman social environment. It is the facts of our failure that convince us of the needs for community effort and community feeling –

but always as *individuals*.

Mat was always tolerant of others' failings as he admitted his own to be never ending! He was, however, downright critical of those who claimed the 'Almighty' privilege of sending ordinary folk to their doom, in war and in political and economic slavery.

Indeed we have lost a dear friend, comrade and adviser in our Movement. May we remember his cheerfulness and his tolerance, but also never forget his deep convictions and struggle for a world of FREE MEN.

I would have his epitaph be: 'TO MAT, WHO HAD GREAT HAPPINESS IN SEEKING FREEDOM FOR ALL MEN.'

Henry Moorhouse.
Aylesbury, Mar. 21.
Freedom 27 March 1954 ■

Audrey Beecham [letter]

Just thought I'd drop you a little note having read the latest Bulletin [Audrey Beecham was mentioned in "Not a good look"? Reading Dave Cope on British anarchist publishing history' in *KSL* 110-111]. I remember Audrey Beecham from Oxford back in the early 1980's. There was a group of us working on the local alternative paper, *The Back Street Bugle*. We formed an anarchist discussion group in the very early 1980's, as I recall. Not sure of the date. Our first meeting was in the Carpenter's Arms and we were approached by this posh elderly woman who turned out to be Audrey. We were all in our early 20's at the time, so it seemed unusual, but she was obviously interested and when she talked about her time in Spain we all got on fine. We even had one meeting round at her flat in North Oxford somewhere. There was an anarchist conference in Oxford round about that time and again Audrey stuck out a bit from the crowd, some London anarchists being particularly suspicious. I'm afraid none of us kept in contact with her after the group dissolved, which I regret in retrospect.

Kevin E ■

Publication details

KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library
ISSN 1475-0309
KSL, BM Hurricane, London, WC1N 3XX
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Number 112

50 pence or one dollar
The Paris Commune

Oct. 2023



March 18, 1871 is a date which will go down in history. On that day Paris no longer intended to govern France; it simply asserted its right to be free, to a self-governed unit. And in appealing to all other centers to do likewise, it resolved to remain: The Paris Commune.

But the best engineer would fail if in doubt of his plans for any important job; and as base for our revolutionary ideal of free communism, we must know and work for the natural equality of men in the domain of right and justice. These conceptions were not ripe among the 1871 Parisian workers.

Indeed, in 1900 I attended a lecture given by Constant who had been a member of the Commune Central Committee, and the impression he left me can never be obliterated.

The Paris Commune – said Constant – had suppressed private property; people had been told that they have the right to select their own dwellings; the right to move anywhere they wanted to without having to pay any back or future rents. Yet, a great number of tenants appeared at the City Hall to tell the Commune Central Committee: "We wish to move, but we cannot, our landlord does not let us." Told over and

over again that they were their own landlords; told to ignore the property owners for the reason that private property had been suppressed, those workers with unripened and unclear ideas of their rights would not move without having with them a voluntary committee which would act as other past governmental agents had acted.

Part of the workers' dwellings – continued Constant – had been destroyed by the result of the siege. To provide shelters for the homeless, the record of empty mansions, left by capitalists who had made their escape to Versailles, had been made, and shelterless workers were sent to those mansions to live there with their families. Still, the same workers went back to the Committee to tell them: "We could never live in those mansions; there are carpets three inches thick; the furniture is too luxurious to be touched ... we find it impossible to live in such high class dwellings." To no avail was the reply: "You, workers, have built those mansions, carved the stones and furniture, woven the carpets and the draperies...!" The workers would not enter the mansions and preferred to live in the storage room or even in the stables.

Here, I have in mind a prominent German philosopher, Louis Buchner, who, in giving illustrations pointing out the urgent need of a social revolution, wrote the following: "No plant can bloom and produce fruits if kept in a cellar. Give it sunshine, light and fresh air, uproot and transport it and instead of being pale and weak, the plant will be full of color and strength."

Surely, this is very true. Still, there must be enough transplantors to bring the job to success. More and deeper convictions need be acquired. This is one of the lessons I received from the Paris Commune.

Jules Scarceraux
From *Individual Action: An Anarchist Publication*
v.2,n.2 (November 17, 1953)

Stockholm police file for Scarceraux at
<https://archive.org/details/arkivkopia.se-signal-19205>
<https://archive.org/details/arkivkopia.se-signal-19206>

[Cartoon: Richard Warren] ■

Jules Scarceriaux. Anarchist.

Scarceriaux was born in Belgium on July 22, 1873 as ‘Jules Fontaine.’ According to FBI files, prior to coming to the United States in 1905, he was imprisoned in France and Germany for anarchist activities.

Scarceriaux moved around from Boston to New York, before ending up in Trenton, New Jersey. While there he became active in both the I.W.W. and the Sanitary Union, Local 45. The FBI made special note of Scarceriaux’s ability to speak nine separate languages, which made him a useful organizer for the I.W.W. His advocacy for the principles of the I.W.W. led to Scarceriaux facing constant criticism within the ranks of the traditional unions, with never-ending threats to bringing him up on charges.

In 1918, Scarceriaux moved to Richmond, CA. While there he faced considerable FBI surveillance regarding his political activity. The FBI informants cozied up Scarceriaux to constantly monitor his movements, documenting his beliefs and activities.

After living in Richmond for roughly a decade, Scarceriaux moved to Los Angeles. From 1928-1946, he and his wife, Sabina, lived at 1005½ 21st in Los Angeles and later at 4629 Pickford. He was employed as a skilled craftman in Hollywood.

While living in Los Angeles, Scarceriaux was active in the libertarian groups around the Boyle Heights area. He worked with the Kropotkin Group of the Workman Circle & Walt Whitman School. He made ceramic plaques of famous anarchists, wrote for *Mother Earth*, *The Road to Freedom* and *Man!* And did translations for these and other periodicals.

On March 24, 1963, Scarceriaux’s wife, Sabina, passed away. Less than two months later on May 2, 1963, Jules also passed away.

Dockstader Anarchist Mutual Aid Society
<https://www.facebook.com/people/Dockstader-Anarchist-Mutual-Aid-Society/100064672570120/>

[KSL Notes: Scarceriaux was also an anarchist librarian, involved in the Communistic Library in Trenton, N. J. see ‘The Most Interesting Library Club in America’ (*International Socialist Review*) <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/t1g3mv>]

Los Angeles’ Black Rose Historical and Mutual Aid Society renamed themselves the Dockstader Anarchist and Mutual Aid Society, in memory of Seth Dockstader (1971-2003) ‘a contemporary who was a loyal friend and comrade to many still active today.’] ■

Seth Dockstader

Since we began our project of uncovering the history of the anarchist movement in Los Angeles, we have worked under the banner, in some form or fashion, as the Black Rose Historical and Mutual Aid Society.

Throughout these years it has been our goal to unearth the lost names of our comrades, rediscover their role in our movement’s history and give remembrance to their sacrifice and dedication. It has been a labor of love since its inception. [...]

Moving forward, the Black Rose Society will be known as the Dockstader Anarchist and Mutual Aid Society. This is in memory of Seth Dockstader. For those who are unaware of Seth, he is not an anarchist from early period of the anarchist movement, but rather a contemporary who was a loyal friend and comrade to many still active today.

Seth was born in San Bernardino County on January 29, 1971. During most of his life he lived and worked with his family at their music camp in Arrowbear. It was this experience that initiated his love for nature and music, something that he would carry with him throughout his life. At some point Seth was introduced to punk and anarchism. He soon found himself living in Long Beach with other anarchists, helping to start one of the first Food Not Bombs in the country. Seth’s commitment to the environment led him to Earth First, advocating direct action on behalf of the planet. It was also during this period he began to perform music under the name “\$eth” which he described as “acoustic rage.” [...]

In May of 1995, Seth negotiated the use of his family’s camp to host the Arrowbear Anarchist Conference. Eventually the collaboration of the various communities helped to establish an anarchist bookstore known as (De)Center in Highland Park (located at 6122 ½ Figueroa Street.) Seth was one of those individuals who helped keep the space going for the several years. Seth also helped to establish another anarchist bookstore inside the Luna Sol Café on 6th Street in Los Angeles.

Seth continued to play an important role in the Southern California and Arizona anarchist community until he disappeared on October 22, 2003. Just before his disappearance, a large wildfire, known as the Old Fire, broke out in the San Bernardino Mountains near his family’s music camp. It was later determined that he perished in the fire.

Those of us who knew Seth were heartbroken of his passing. Many of us still carry the burden and weight of his loss. But as time passes and memories fade, we want to ensure that his name is kept alive in our community. It is for this reason we have renamed this project in his honor, ensuring that our community continues to pay tribute to his dedication and love for a better world.

Dockstader Anarchist Mutual Aid Society
<https://www.facebook.com/people/Dockstader-Anarchist-Mutual-Aid-Society/100064672570120> ■

Walking in the old ruts

At no period in its history has the British Labour Movement given rise to so much speculation, and for

Letterpress Revolution then is essential reading. It is a result of exhaustive and detailed research that clarifies instead of obscures. Ferguson’s work brings back into our history some anarchists who until now had disappeared as well as adding knowledge about those anarchists we thought we knew everything there was to know about. This work opens up many paths for militants, researchers and writers to follow in trying understand anarchism and anarchists and their relation to anarchy. It enriches anarchist history allowing us to appreciate the nuances and bravery of people as well as their complexities.

Barry Pateman

Letterpress Revolution: The Politics of Anarchist Print Culture by Kathy E. Ferguson. Duke University Press, 2023 <https://dukeupress.edu/letterpress-revolution> ■

Mat Kavanagh: A Tribute

After a brief illness, Mat Kavanagh died on Friday, March 12th [1954]; and with him a rich link with the movement’s past is severed. Very few comrades have been so widely known in the anarchist movement in this country, for he addressed audiences in many towns right up till recent months. And wherever he spoke he renewed old acquaintances and made many new ones. His influence was especially strong with the younger members of the movement, for not only did he introduce many of them to anarchism, but he opened up for them a whole world of individual anarchists of the past who would otherwise have remained unknown to them.

Mat Kavanagh was indeed a ‘good old chronicle’ of the anarchist movement which he had entered in early youth when he came to England from his native Dublin. He knew and worked with Kropotkin, Malatesta, and Rudolf Rocker in the years before the war of 1914, but he knew well also the less well known militants who helped to build the English and Scottish movements, and in later years he wrote a series of articles on the lesser known pioneers of English anarchism in FREEDOM. Just how far back his personal memories went was illustrated by his anecdotes about old Edward Craig whom Mat knew at the end of his long life, and who, in his early manhood had been the inspirer of the Owenite Commune at Ralahine in the years 1830-33.

During the war of 1914 Kavanagh, together with Tom Keell and Malatesta, adopted the anti-war position and opposed the paradoxical attitude of Kropotkin, Jean Grave, and others who supported the war. He was an equally determined opponent of war in 1939 and never deviated from the traditional anarchist position of anti-militarism. A vigorous debater, he held his opinions firmly and stated them clearly. Yet one may doubt if he had any enemies at all, for he possessed a singular kindness and his most downright utterances were nevertheless clothed

in the most genial form which made it impossible even for political opponents to take exception to them.

*

Mat was the antithesis of the armchair revolutionary. He was always at the active centre of the movement’s work and came into contact with almost all the continental anarchists who from time to time took refuge in this country. The sweetness of temperament which he shared with Kropotkin by no means inclined him to pacifism any more than Kropotkin himself, and he had much experience of clashes with authority. He was, in fact, imprisoned no less than 9 times, always on revolutionary issues, and could discourse most entertainingly on the prisons of these islands.

1916 found him in Dublin, for he had sensed the coming Irish rebellion and had joined with Larkin and Connolly in preparing for the Easter uprising. He was never, however, deluded by the nationalist aspirations of the Irish which finally triumphed over the revolutionary ideas of 1916, and his anarchism was just as unacceptable to the Irish Free State as to the British Empire.

During the years after the old FREEDOM ceased regular publication and Tom Keell had retired to Whiteway, Gloucestershire (a colony which in its earliest, anarchist, days Mat helped to establish) he was one of the most militant of those who kept the ideas of anarchism alive. Hence he was able to provide one of the links with the past for the renewal of impetus which anarchism received from interest in the Spanish Revolution of 1936.

After the last war he spoke on behalf of the Union of Anarchist Groups at one of the International Anarchist Congresses in Paris (characteristically making new friends among some of the younger French comrades), and was probably the most regular speaker in the London Anarchist lecture series and at Hyde Park until in recent years he, too, retired to Whiteway. During the last year of his life he moved to the cottage of a comrade in the Wye Valley.

*

Mat was 78. His wealth of reminiscences continually reminded one of his age; but his upright brisk figure, his twinkling eye and his love of conviviality always contradicted his years and on his last visit to London a few months ago he seemed as full of youthful zest as ever. This effervescent love of life never left him though those who knew him well were aware also of private sorrows of which the death of his only son, when still not twenty, during the early years of the last war, was the most afflicting.

Wherever he found himself Mat was always an anarchist. His experience taught him to adhere to the traditional ideas of the movement and his judgment was always sane, well-balanced and expressed with

Emma Goldman: Political Thinking in the Streets. (Rowman and Littlefield, 2011) as well as a host of articles exploring the relationship between anarchist history and political theory. As you might expect then, from this writer, *Letterpress Revolution* is meticulously researched drawing extensively on primary sources. The section on “Printers and Presses” is a tour de force as she introduces us to anarchists known and less known. We see how physically demanding printing was and we can only be impressed by the hard work of those around the newspaper *Firebrand*, for instance, who after a full day’s work at their full-time jobs would set the next edition of the paper. Hard work is reflected in the efforts of the eccentric but determined English anarchist Dan Chatterton using abandoned type to produce his broadsheets on tissue like paper that had a short life span, to say the least. Women printers are highlighted and given long overdue recognition as they developed their skills often facing arrant sexism within anarchist circles. Ferguson tells the story of Georgia Replogle co-printer and editor of the paper *Egoism*, who in 1891, addressed Benjamin Tucker’s charges that women printers were incompetent in her own paper using type she had set by her own hand!!! We also learn more information about people we thought we knew well. Who knew that Alexander Berkman could set type in four languages or that Sarah Elizabeth Holmes set type for *Liberty* and *The Science of Society*?

It isn’t always about the reliable and steady production of texts though. Yes, there are some beautiful creations from the typesetting of anarchists but there is a harsher reality that Ferguson doesn’t shy away from. In 1901 *Free Society* had its type and press destroyed by police after the assassination of McKinley. The London based paper *Freedom* was raided four times over the course of the First World War with essential type and machinery being taken by the authorities. We might add to this the astonishing efforts of anarchists to keep their presses alive in a time of deadly oppression. From 1928 onwards Severino di Giovanni was on the run from the Buenos Aires police. Over the three years until his arrest in 1931 he somehow managed to print material – including two volumes of *Social Writings* by Elisee Reclus (di Giovanni was planning 6!) We should also recognize the efforts to keep alive the Spanish anarchist paper *Solidaridad Obrera* under the most repressive of conditions. What editions they could print after the Francoist victory in 1939 were produced in clandestinity with death awaiting the printers if they were discovered. There are countless other examples that reflect the courage of printers and editors

There is a problematic aspect side of anarchist printing too which we shouldn’t shy away from. Put simply it could be argued that those who possessed a press and the skills to print were powerful figures

within anarchism. They owned the means of production and this question of ownership could cause tension in anarchist ranks. The 1945 split in British anarchism was driven, at times, by whether a certain group or the movement owned the press. A similar situation in Argentina occurred during the nineteen twenties. The newspaper *La Protesta* had a printing press and this was an important source of tension, together with growing political differences, between that paper and another anarchist paper *La Antorcha*. Unfortunately for anarchism these are not isolated occurrences.

Ferguson’s work on analyzing the two American newspapers *Firebrand*, and *Free Society* as well as the London based *Freedom* is empathetic and shrewd. *Letterpress Revolution* has already shown her skill and sensitivity in reading correspondence between anarchists in the section *Epistolarity* and these skills are re-enforced as she analyses certain tendencies in the content of the papers relating to what they were trying to achieve. Her work reflects a close reading and gives us some cause for thought as she shows how these newspapers attempted to challenge the passive “We write you read” approach to the expression of anarchist ideas. Her explorations should also encourage us to consider how people became anarchists. What journeys did they take to reach that end? What role did the reading of newspapers and books have in that journey? We might also consider the role of the humble flier or leaflet in anarchist propaganda. *Freedom* before 1914 was adept at producing fliers to address a certain current event or topic – a miner’s strike, unemployment or elections for example. The list of books advertised in the papers are fascinating and often reflect the importance of related movements and ideas such as freethought for many anarchists of this period.

Letterpress Revolution ends with a final section on anarchist theory and how it can develop, seeing the adoption of intersectionality as an exciting and hopeful way forward. Many practices are essentially anarchist without anarchists necessarily being involved. There is hope and there is contemporary practice we can all take heart from. Such ideas are important as we consider how to defeat the sinewy power and cruelty of capitalism as did the printers and writers who appear in this volume and anarchists have always done.

The book also includes three valuable appendices the first being a thorough and wide-ranging list of anarchist printers that is unique and essential for any further study. Ferguson also offers detailed biographical files on some who appear in the text. Finally there are details of her interviews with current printers, bits of which appear throughout the book. There is an exhaustive bibliography which repays careful perusal.

quite obvious reasons. Born out of the conflict of class antagonisms, it has survived a century before it has been brought face to face with the incontestable argument of the Anarchists, that the emancipation of labour from the wages system is an economic problem, and that to make an assault on the House of Commons through the medium of a political Labour party to achieve its salvation is as fatal as practising nudism at the poles.

Despite the position with which it is confronted, there is as yet no sound evidence that any lesson has been learned. The only activity of any particular note that has resulted from the debacle of the past twelve months is afforded by the breakaway of the I.L.P. from the leading strings of the Labour Party. But even the I.L.P., in spite of the unquestioned qualities of its leaders, appears to be still putting the cart before the horse, for in the plans arising from the specially convened Bradford Conference one finds a surveying of constituencies ‘with a view to nominating Parliamentary candidates’ taking precedence over the attention directed towards the industrial movement.

Even more unfortunate still is the passive attitude of the Trade Union movement. Here, over a long period, active work in the Trade Union has been regarded as a stepping stone to Parliamentary honours; and when one tries to discover what gains the workers have derived through the incentive of political-minded Trade Union leadership one is immediately reminded of the sabotage of the general strike in 1926 by men whose careers had been launched down the slips of Trade Unionism.

It is not surprising, therefore, that at a moment when the Labour movement is divided amongst itself, the powers that be, confronted with a steady but persistent decline in world trade, should be launching fresh attacks on the already impoverished standards of the workers. Never, from the point of view of the employers, was there a more opportune moment for such an onslaught, and the offensive which began in the coalfields has now burst out anew upon the cotton workers of Lancashire. Cotton, however, like coal, has its explosive qualities, and signs are not lacking that the challenge thrown down to the workers may be thrown back at the masters. Either the weavers will have to weave their own shroud or that of the cotton barons, an issue which can never be in doubt if Labour will mobilise its forces with sound understanding. But it is exactly at this point that serious misgivings present themselves. A clear understanding of what is to be aimed at and how to achieve it is obscured by erroneous theories. One finds, for instance, the same type of careerists advocating compromise, and urging the workers to prepare themselves for the struggle at the next election, whilst others assert that with the collapse of private enterprise in industry the State must take over the control of all derelict enterprises and democratise

them, whatever that may mean. And then one finds that revolutionary type who look upon the present collapse of capitalism as a stage in a malignant disease, and who are advocating the workers to prepare to run industry as soon as opportunity presents itself for them to seize power. Socialism to them is an inevitable phase in economic development, and must necessarily follow the capitalistic era. The fervour of this type is magnificent and it is easy to be aroused by their enthusiasm, but enthusiasm cuts no ice unless it is properly harnessed. Bad as things are, there is as yet nothing to indicate that the masses have lost faith in the institution of government. Astute enough to see this fact, and possessing all the cunning of a Machiavelli, the rulers of this country will carry the day. Let necessity prove the need for the nationalising of this, or the State ownership of that, and the rulers will bring it to pass; but let not the workers think this will mean workers’ control. Let circumstances point to the advantages of abolishing unemployment, and the rulers will bring it to pass; but let not the workers imagine this will bring economic liberty.

Economic Liberty; Free Communism; Anarchism; these, it is alleged, are dreams, and until the workers are aroused out of their coma, dreams they will remain. Poverty, with all its trail of misery and want, stalks the land. To offer sympathy without help is a crime, but to offer hope without understanding would be treachery of the vilest degree. The emancipation of the workers from the bonds of wage-slavery is a difficult task but not an impossible one. Just as the totems of a bygone age have been relegated to the museums, so must the fetishes of to-day be brushed aside. All the needs of the workers lie within their own power to supply, and nothing will withstand them when they engage in that task, for, as Goethe has written:

‘Only engage, and then the mind grows heated – Begin it, and the work will be completed!’

H. MACE.

Freedom Bulletin no.15 (December 1932) ■

History notes (Sept. 2023)

The Unstoppable Anarchist Ersilia Cavedagni

‘US authorities referred to her as a *very dangerous anarchist* and of *limited formal instruction but much audaciousness*’.

<https://thetransmetropolitanreview.wordpress.com/2023/09/12/the-unstoppable-anarchist-ersilia-cavedagni/>

The Patacons, a libertarian band in the Prades Mountains

by Imanol: ‘In the unequal contest, women played an essential role even though they may not have been actually present in the forests.’

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/5mknhc> ■

Defeat and Revival : Thoughts on The Weight of the Stars [Book Review]

In 2013 Barry Pateman wrote a piece about Ethel Mannin's *No More Mimosa*, his contact with Spanish anarchist exiles and the contrast between the revolutionary situation they had been part of and the grim reality of defeat. 'Exile meant the end of nearly everything they had known. [...] A terrible protective dignity became their defense against a world that had cast them adrift.' [1]

The anarchist exiles were hardly a homogenous bloc. Different choices, experiences, attitudes and status within the movement before 1939 saw to that (never mind the difference between being exiled in, say, France or Mexico). As a child, Octavio Alberola went into exile with his family: his father was the rationalist schoolteacher José Alberola Navarro who clashed with some members of the Durruti Column: 'The revolution's purpose is not providing opportunities for vengeance, but rather to set an example.' [p.20]

In exile in Mexico, Octavio met Fidel Castro and Che Guevara before they were famous; and also fell foul of the unwritten rule that refugees should not get involved in Mexican politics. After that, Alberola was part of the anarchist resurgence (and not only within the Spanish movement) that we think of as part of the sixties. Partly this connected with the confidence of a new generation, as seen at the Limoges Congress of 1961: 'On one side stood the "veterans," the militants who had fought against fascism in the civil war. They were now twenty-two years older, fifty years old and up. Mature, tempered people who proceeded at a comfortable pace. On the other side were the "newcomers," the children of exile, who had left Spain at a very young age or been born elsewhere. With no investment in the myth, they didn't hesitate to make action the priority.' [p.114]

Octavio was part of this 'activist' current, being involved in Defensa Interior and the First of May Group. Neither group succeeded in assassinating Franco but their other strand of symbolic actions generated much negative publicity for the Spanish dictatorship. Not to mention a certain amount of controversy within the movement. After the Ussia kidnapping by the First of May Group,[2] leaders of the CNT denounced the 'thoroughly negative initiative' [p.176] only to be answered 'They at least are living in the present rather in the past like some older militants who once had credibility, or in the future, like others who make anarchy the way they would construct scale models once their working hours are over or when they have time on their hands'.[3]. Some veterans, Like Cipriano Mera or Juan Garcia Oliver, were involved in the Defensa

Interior, so it was not purely a difference of generations.

The Weight of the Stars is an essential contribution to the history of the anarchist struggle against Francoism. Stuart Christie felt a personal duty to commemorate 'the hundreds of thousands of brave people who fought, suffered, died and lost loved ones in the selfless cause of resisting the reactionary, priest-, gun- and prison-backed ideology that was Francoism.' [4] Other comrades have expressed the same obligation to me more bluntly with the words 'people fucking died'.

Beyond that, the book is valuable for showing that you can be concerned with the struggle for historical memory without living in the past. Alberola has kept engaged with current issues. See, for example, his view of how we got to our current situation: 'Capitalism is unfair and noxious, it is stained with blood and represents an ecological threat, but with its pragmatic approach, it rode roughshod over the experiment in actual socialism, which was itself yet another bloodstained caricature of capitalism. Thus, from the 1980s onwards, capitalism was everything.'

I'm grateful to Comotto for the work he has put in. I think there must be many comrades out there who have been too busy living and held off writing their life story – Comotto's work means that we hear, rather than just wondering what Alberola's view is. And we have to thank Paul Sharkey that we can read it in English.

Notes

- 1, 'No More Mimosa by Ethel Mannin: A re-consideration and appreciation' *Bulletin of the [Aotearoa-New Zealand] Labour History Project* (December 2013) <https://lhp.org.nz/2013/12/16/labour-history-project-bulletin-59-december-2013/>, reprinted in *KSL: Bulletin of the Kate Sharpley Library* No. 78-79, September 2014
- 2, see 'One Episode in the Libertarian Movement's Struggle against Francoism : The "First of May Group" and the kidnapping in Rome of Monsignor Marcos Ussia, the ecclesiastical attaché at Spain's embassy to the Vatican (Friday 29 April 1966 – Wednesday 11 May 1966)' by Antonio Téllez at <https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/k6dkx7>
- 3, G. Debras in *Le Combat Syndicaliste*, quoted on p.177
- 4, page ii of *General Franco made me a Terrorist*

The Weight of the Stars: The Life of Anarchist Octavio Alberola by Agustín Comotto with Octavio Alberola, translated by Paul Sharkey.

<https://www.akpress.org/the-weight-of-the-stars.html>

There's a review by Xavier Montanyà, originally published on Christiebooks, at

<https://www.katesharpleylibrary.net/59zxfn> ■



Everyday Anarchist

A Life for Anarchy: A Stuart Christie Reader edited by the Kate Sharpley Library 282pp. AK Press 2021

It must be difficult to be best known for something you didn't manage to do, as was the case with Stuart Christie (1946-2020), who did not manage to kill Spanish dictator Francisco Franco. But like an excellent doctor who nonetheless loses a patient now and again, Christie must be lauded for the attempt. He should also be lauded for his successes, and *A Life for Anarchy: A Stuart Christie Reader*, edited by the Kate Sharpley Library, is an excellent step in cementing Christie's posthumous reputation, and those of his comrades.

The work of creating a new world is slow and agonizing, and rather involves a lot of both publishing and prison time, to name two things Christie was very familiar with. Christie co-founded Cienfuegos Press, which thought big even while being small. One of its most notorious titles, *Towards A Citizens' Militia*, was a guide to irregular, non-Soviet backed, warfare in case of invasion, and led to intense scrutiny from the state. And yet, at the same time, Christie summarizes the Cienfuegos project as the production of titles with a "limited circulation of around 3,000 anarchists and police agents." Perhaps we won't be fielding significant guerrilla forces any time soon. But, then again, maybe...

The state is an implacable enemy, despite its role in, for example, mailing you a copy of this book review. It is omnipresent, but not omnipotent, as

Christie makes clear via his memoirs of his prison time, where intraleft sectarianism vanishes, where so many of the people he knew and worked with continued to organize while facing privation, surveillance, and torture. Christie's projects were not about building institutions that could conquer the state, create a new one, or produce checklists for either necessarily violent, or non-violent, revolution. "If people will say TO HELL WITH THE STATE (sic) then at least wish them well" as Christie said in his defense of the Angry Brigade, is the long and short of his politics, and this openness is what allowed him to be prolific and so connected to the international movement. A significant section of *A Life for Anarchy* is wisely dedicated to other lives through Christie's appreciations and obituaries of anarchists from Scotland, Spain, and elsewhere across the mileu.

A Life for Anarchy is polyphonic in another way as well: the final third is a series of appreciations of Christie from many of the people he worked with. Some are touching politico-personal reminiscences, such as the funeral speech from his daughter Branwen, who shares both anecdotes about Christie's grandchildren, and his commitment to social justice. Others are more explicitly political and biographical, detailing his activism, the state repression he faced, and what kept him going. As one comrade, MH, (shadowy!) explains, "Despite what he's best known for – the big name actions, it always struck me that at heart he was very much an everyday anarchist who would get involved in whatever needed doing including the unglamorous stuff as well." And that's the kind of anarchist we need to remember, and the kind we need.

Nick Mamatas

The Anarchist Review of Books #3 Winter/Spring 2022, <https://www.anarchistreviewofbooks.org/> ■

Fighting the "monster of ignorance" [Book review]

Letterpress Revolution: The Politics of Anarchist Print Culture by Kathy E. Ferguson

Printers were crucial in the anarchist challenge to what Jay Fox called the "monster of ignorance" (p52) Their skills and perseverance would enable anarchist thought to enter the written world in the form of fliers, pamphlets and newspapers and offer some challenge to the economic and emotional brutalities of capitalism. This work by Kathy Ferguson offers us a path into both the lives of some of these printers – past and present – and a clear explanation of their skills. Through her we understand what just printing a text means as well as what that text is doing.

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